

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: March 25, 2010

Meeting No:110

Project: Proposed Addition to Leith Walk School

Phase: Continued Schematic

Location: Northeast Baltimore

PRESENTATION:

Tony Marshall, of the Facilities Design and Construction Department, Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), and Construction Manager for the project re-introduced the project scope and explained the project phases necessary to expand the school from 70,000 square feet to 180,000 square feet. He introduced the packet that included the additional information requested by the Panel at the March 11th presentation. Jayson Thoemke of Colimore Thoemke Architects presented the revised project and additional information. Key elements of the presentation included:

- A master plan showing how the existing building would be incorporated into the full build-out;
- Moving the main entrance of the school from Sherwood Avenue to Glennor Road;
- Concentration of the play facilities to the corner of Glennor and Gleneagle Roads;
- Distribution of parking to various locations on the site;
- The intention to have the expansion relate directly to the existing building in materials and color.

COMMENTS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel appreciates the additional information on the proposed building, site and landscape improvements and the clear format of its presentation. The following specific comments were made:

- A. *Edge conditions of the project including sidewalks, gateways, fences and landscaping* – The Panel members continued to express serious concern regarding the lack of a successful design concept for these elements. The detailed Site Plan was very helpful
1. **Sidewalks:** The inclusion of the sidewalks in the Site Plan is very helpful. The Panel is pleased that there are sidewalks surrounding the site. It

recommends eliminating sidewalks on BOTH sides of the entry drives and instead believes that a single walk that is connected from the street to the school's entry plaza is safer for pedestrians and will result in a reduction of hardscape.

2. **Gateway:** The inclusion of a “gateway” at the new Glennor Street entry drive is good; however, the proposed components read more as bus shelters than a civic expression of the school's presence. This element should provide/reinforce the school's identity for the students, the community, and the visitors to the school. This is particularly important since the project design calls for a complete re-orientation of entry to the school **and** the former entry will remain as a secondary entry point, and for the school's new role as a K-8 facility.
 3. **Fences:** There was no discussion of fences. If fences will be introduced the Panel would like to see the design.
 4. **Landscaping:** The trees as proposed on the site plan are welcome. However, the Panel would like to see the “Green” initiative (the project is seeking LEED certification) clearly expressed in the landscape. It is looking for more creativity, such as flower and vegetable garden areas for student use, innovative storm water components, planted walks/steps through the steeper areas, etc. presented as “teachable moment” opportunities.
- B. ***The role of the attached Recreation Center Building***– The Panel is pleased that the BCPS has decided to include the exterior of the attached (but separate) recreation facility into the project façade design.
- C. ***The “look” of the project*** – There is a lingering concern that the new design turns its back on the school's original aesthetic rather than capitalizing on it. The new entry appears successful, but it is clearly unassociated with the existing building, much of which is still exposed on the exterior. The original mid-century school design was not based on symmetry but rather was presented as an asymmetrical series of interlocking elements, while the new design attempts to overlay a symmetrical aesthetic over the old. This is particularly evident in the expression of the “knuckle” between old and new at the new rear elevation of the building. It appears too formal for a rear elevation, reading almost as the main entry (although the Panel acknowledges that this elevation faces a residential street and therefore, should be fully articulated). The Panel encourages the architects to consider how they might address the knuckle in a less formal way, perhaps more sympathetically to the mid-century aesthetic without diminishing the articulation so important for an elevation that is on view from a public street. In addition, the Panel still has concern that the completed building could be less massive and relate more to the scale of its surroundings.
- D. ***1% Art Program*** –The Panel would like to feel more comfortable that the areas identified for the city's 1% art program actually will function appropriately for the art assigned to the school and asks that the concept for this art be incorporated at an early stage.

E. *The importance and role of the proposed outdoor recreation/play area versus parking*– The Panel expresses its strong conviction that the plan fails to include adequate outdoor recreation /play space for a K-8 school population. The Panel believes that parking has been given a priority over the students’ need for outdoor space, and that this issue needs to be addressed before proceeding. Arguments related to steep topography are weak, as parking lots, rather than play space, fill the majority of the less steep sites. Further, there will be significant re-grading to construct the school, making the argument that topography prohibits additional play space again weak. The Panel believes that less outdoor area should be designated for parking and more outdoor area assigned to recreational/play uses with re-grading as necessary to accomplish that goal. This is particularly critical along Glennor Road, in front of the school’s new entrance, where the parking lots should be omitted in favor of playing fields. The Panel continues to recommend that the architects reduce the amount of parking on the site, seek opportunities to connect the separate pieces of the on-site parking, and establish a coordinated and functional plan for recreation spaces and hardscape.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic approval with comments.

Attending:

Tony Marshall – Facility Design and Construction Department, BCPS

Jayson Thoemke – Colimore Thoemke Architects

Jay Brodie, Paul Dombrowski – BDC

Ms. Eig, Messrs. Bowden, Britt, Cameron, Ramberg – Panel

Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Laurie Feinberg, Sara Paraniham, Wolde Ararsa, Anthony Cataldo - Planning